

### Manifesting #MeToo

When allegations against Harvey Weinstein of rape and sexual misconduct first surfaced, they provoked a tidal wave of women finding strength in each other's words, and finally feeling able to make their experiences heard. In the wake of this, the #MeToo movement has garnered widespread attention, and is now providing an accessible platform for survivors of abuse to share their story and initiate their pathway to recovery. Though #MeToo was founded over ten years ago, in a peak of social media usage, Tarana Burke's movement is now enabling a global community of women working together to fight the alarming prevalence of sexual violence.

Though people are affected regardless of gender, women are much more likely to be sexually violated than men. In 2014, 83% of reported Australian victims were female (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). In a 2016 survey, 53% of women and 25% of men responded that they had been sexually harassed in their lifetime (Hermant & Hanrahan, 2017). These numbers are exceedingly and horrifically high across the board, however the issue predominantly concerns women. Sexual misconduct is far more than a current concern for Hollywood and its constituents; it is a devastating epidemic. Hence, it is vital to highlight how sexual assault can impact the mental health of its victims, and how we can create resolutions lessening this worldwide.

During the attack, victims often say they dissociated or felt disorientated; this is sometimes exacerbated due to intoxication or being under the influence of a drug. Immediately after, they may have intrusive and unexpected flashbacks to the assault due to a trigger, or a wish to re-enact the event in order to 'change its ending'. One survivor shares her story through 'The Voices and Faces Project', an initiative created to raise awareness for sexual violence by giving victims an outlet through which to voice their recollection and emotions following the assault. After being raped by friends of her best friend, this survivor discusses her "difficulty sleeping" and "unpredictable fits of crying and shaking". For the rest of her college year, she "wasn't conscious most of the time". The long term mental effects of sexual violence include a diagnosis of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder or changes in attitudes towards sexuality and social functioning. In *Lived Through This* by Anne K. Ream, founder of 'The Voices and Faces Project', several women describe themselves as being "damaged goods", and "afraid to put on makeup... because it might make (them) appealing to an attacker" (Lonsway & Archambault, 2017). Without appropriate methods of support and rehabilitation, these psychological changes can be of great consequence to a victim's way of living.

However, the effects of sexual violence are highly variable. First and foremost, every person's life experience leading up to an attack is different, and, as such, the impact and management of the attack can be handled in a myriad of ways. Furthermore, the way a victim reacts physically, emotional and mentally after sexual trauma is dependent on several factors, most notably: their relationship to the perpetrator, the severity of the abuse and the reactions of those in her life to the assault, such as family, friends, and the police (Boyd, 2011).

Cultural and economic background, too, are factors that must be considered when discussing the ramifications of sexual violence on its victim. Though rape culture is rife throughout the world today, it is more prevalent and far more visible in developing countries. This is seen through the style in which Indian communities and families are often portrayed to treat being a victim of sexual assault; it is shameful, and a consequence of female sexual liberation due to the westernisation of some parts of the culture. In a rape case in Ghaziabad, a woman was brutally attacked by five men. To this, the mother of one of the accused males responded that "if girls roam around openly... then boys will make mistakes". One of the rapists confessed that he thought his actions would bear no consequence as the "victim would not come forward because the shame would be too great" (Polgreen, 2011). With these regressive and demeaning attitudes commonplace within society, it can become increasingly difficult for an affected woman to reveal what has transpired. Accompanying this difficulty can be greater feelings of guilt and the burden of working through trauma independently, further degrading a victim's ability to move on and prevent the escalation of any mental health concerns that may arise.

Another variable is socioeconomic standing. According to a 2004 study in America, homeless women were three times as likely to be sexually violated as those who were housed. The two main reasons affiliated with this are susceptibility and a perceived lack of credibility. Firstly, without a door to lock, women become much more vulnerable as potential victims of assault; they also may be manipulated into exchanging basic requirements like food or shelter for sex. Secondly, if a homeless woman does report an offence, the high incidence of substance abuse or existing mental illness means that the case is often unlikely to be taken seriously and carried through to any sentencing. (Lonsway & Archambault, 2017).

Fortunately, in the current political and cultural climate, the importance of fighting back against the frequency of sexual harassment and the unjust treatment of victims and perpetrators is becoming emphasised within daily life. With initiatives like #MeToo and Time's Up occupying the limelight at events like the Golden Globes, and 'The Silence Breakers' being named Time's 2017 Person of the Year, it is becoming increasingly evident that there is a worldwide force being created which has the power to enact widespread and rapid change. Every new allegation against a celebrity is noticed and commented on around the globe; every story shared via Twitter can be spread, the writer offered

support and empathy. Organisations like the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, which sponsors the US' National Sexual Assault Hotline, or Australia's Full Stop Foundation, offer trauma counselling services and the ability to speak to someone post-attack while minimising the fear of being judged or criticised. And as society progresses and is able to better understand the circumstances surrounding sexual assault, it is hoped that more women will feel comfortable sharing their experience, hence, allowing them the opportunity to find resources and facilities that will assist in recovery.

However, the fundamental crisis to be solved in the issue of sexual violence is decreasing the number of attacks. This begins with clear explanations of consent, presented throughout safe sex education, and enforcing the vitality of overt communication and mutual respect in relationships. It involves believing the experiences of victims, and not questioning the way in which their actions may have led the perpetrator astray. It means making it a point to stand against those who commit acts of sexual harassment, and using the events taking place in Hollywood to issue an explicit statement: Abuse can and will not be tolerated under any conditions.

In 2006, Tarana Burke created #MeToo. In 2018, we must strive to use her movement and its current momentum to execute largescale actions that can push us closer to a society void of rape culture and sexual abuse.

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